

*DEUS SIVE NATURA – THE METAMORPHOSIS OF A DICTUM
FROM MAIMONIDES TO SPINOZA*

I

The relationship between the dissemination of Maimonidean thought and the emergence of Jewish mysticism still requires clarification in order to understand more fully some of the major processes in the religious and intellectual history of Judaism. In the period following the death of Maimonides, two main interpretations of Judaism surfaced exactly at the same time and competed with each other in a conspicuous way, each of them claiming to represent the correct interpretation of Judaism.¹ Though this competition is a crucial fact in the development of Jewish speculative literature, there is no doubt that the Kabbalists learned a lot not only from the halakhic *opus* of Maimonides, but also from his other works and indeed profited from a variety of themes treated by "the great eagle."² Here we are concerned only with the influence of Maimonides' view of nature on Kabbalah. We will be primarily concerned with tracing the developments within certain kabbalistic circles of Maimonides' understanding of the relationship between the natural and the divine.

However, before addressing our main theme, let me briefly comment on the reverberation of an interesting Maimonidean concept on Kabbalah: his view regarding the constant miracles. Cursorily presented in his *Treatise on Resurrection*,³ the conception of a natural order that conforms to the biblical requirements concerning human behaviour had a long and far reaching career in a series of Kabbalistic texts, starting with Nahmanides' writings.⁴ Though similar views can be detected also in the writing of Jewish thinkers preceding Maimonides,⁵ Nahmanides quotes him alone when elaborating on the view of hidden miracles. The basic assumption of the existence of an underlying process that is occult by definition and is therefore invisible to the contemplator of natural processes, struck a sensible chord in the Kabbalistic view of reality. However, far from becoming occasionalists, in the sense of the Mutakallimun,⁶ the Kabbalists used Maimonides' view concerning hidden miracles in order to propose another level of processes which regulate nature. The biblical conception of the interrelation of human behaviour and natural processes did not satisfy the religious interest that dictates now the way of understanding the

function of the hidden miracles. Rather, for the Kabbalists, the supernal structure of the Sefirot, the source of the main changes in the terrestrial world, was affected by the performance or the lack of performance of the commandments, so that the regular way of the world is conceived to be a hidden miracle. This concept of the Kabbalists transformed what may be designated as an occasionalism of the divine will, into one that focuses mainly on the human will.⁷ In other words, Kabbalah projected the natural order on a divine realm, superimposing the supernal sefirotic processes on the natural events, thereby transforming the Bible into the major source for the proper understanding of reality in both history and nature, at least as far as the people of Israel are concerned. The divine book became a clue for understanding the book of nature, a notion that ultimately entered the Renaissance thought through the intermediacy of Pico della Mirandola.⁸ The various avatars of the Maimonidean view of constant miracles in Kabbalah is not our concern here. I nevertheless would like to point out that those Kabbalists who adopted the hidden miracle theory followed Maimonides only indirectly through the intermediacy of Nahmanides. A common denominator of these Kabbalists is the fact that they belong to the theosophical-theurgical Kabbalah, namely the main trend in Catalonian and Castilian Kabbalah until the Expulsion, a fact that will be dealt with later in our presentation.

II

Several scholars have pointed out the possible affinity of the well-known phrase of Spinoza *Deus sive natura* with certain Jewish texts.⁹ Some have also indicated that Jewish mystical sources were the source of Spinoza's idea specifically the gematria *Elohim* [God] and *Ha-Teva'* [Nature].¹⁰ In contrast, S. Pines noted the possibility that Maimonides' formulation, including an implicit identity of the natural and divine acts could, at least partially, have influenced Spinoza.¹¹ These proposals seem to be, *prima facie*, exclusive of each other. Furthermore, it seems improbable that the philosopher had combined so utterly different types of sources. In the following pages, I shall attempt to trace the line of development from Maimonides to the Kabbalistic sources that may have been before the eyes of Spinoza. My major concern will be to combine the two abovementioned explanations by showing how Maimonides was understood by his Kabbalistic followers, in order to propose the first detailed description of the history of the gematria. *Elohim* equals *Ha-Teva'*. However, since so many sources existed, including some in print and available to Spinoza when he formulated his views, it is difficult to pinpoint one particular source alone which may have been the source of Spinoza's dictum. As we shall see, the equation of a certain divine name and nature was already a commonplace, a fact that strengthens the possibility of Jewish influence in general, but complicates the task of a scholar trying to establish the direct influence of one specific text on the philosopher.

Let me start with the ancient Jewish sources that contributed to the emergence of the equation of *Elohim* and nature.

It is an obvious fact that in the first chapter of Genesis, the sole divine name used in the creational process is the name *Elohim*. This peculiar fact did not escape the meticulous scrutiny of the Rabbis, who pointed out the consistent usage of this name in comparison to the total absence of the Tetragrammaton.¹² This initial chapter of the Pentateuch dealing with the account of creation, was regularly referred to as *Ma'aseh Bereshit*.¹³ This term, an organic part of the esoteric nomenclature of Jewish mysticism, was reinterpreted by Maimonides as referring to Aristotelian physics, in Hebrew *Hokmat Ha-Teva'*, the science of nature.¹⁴ It seems reasonable to assume that the consistent occurrence of *Elohim* in that part of the Bible which deals, according to Maimonides, with the science of nature, might have contributed to the understanding of the divine, i.e. *Elohi*, as tantamount to natural, *tivi'i*. I would like to emphasize that this possible mutation of meaning regarding *Elohim* or *Elohi* is not the only reason, nor may it even be the most important reason for the conceptual affinity between divine and natural. However, it seems implausible that Maimonides could have ignored this factor as one of his reasons for the equation *Elohi=Tivi'i*.

This implicit equation occurs in at least three instances in the *Guide*, in each case regarding different topics. In the *Guide* I:1, p. ii, human intellect is understood as that part in man that is the image of God, *Zelem Elohim*, which is considered to be a natural form.¹⁴ If the term image, *Zelem* is an allegory for the intellect, or the form, then *Elohim* was probably conceived of by Maimonides as parallel to "natural." In another place, Maimonides wrote [*Guide*, I:66, p. 160]:

"And the tables were the work of God [Ex. 32:16]. He intends to signify by this that this existence was natural and not artificial, for all natural things are called "the work of the Lord."

The Hebrew phrase *Ma'aseh Elohim* is interpreted as pointing to the natural existence of the tables. Finally, in the *Guide* III:32, p. 525 we read:

If you consider the divine actions – I mean to say the natural the deity's will graciousness and wisdom, as shown in the creation of living beings, in the gradation of the motions of the limbs, and the proximity of some of the latter to others, will through them become clear to you."

It is in the context of this last quote that S. Pines notes that Spinoza's expression *Deus sive natura* "may have been, at least in part, suggested by this passage of the *Guide*".¹⁵

The three areas where Maimonides understood the divine activity as natural were the human intellect, the human *body*, or the *bodies* of any living being, and even mineral objects such as tables of stone. Accordingly, Maimonides considered both the spiritual and the corporeal levels of nature as possibly divine.

The Maimonidean understanding of the natural and the divine as two related

and overlapping categories was engendered by the penetration of the Greek notion of spirituality, in our case, the concept of God as the source of the forms that represent the spiritual dimension of any creature. By applying the notion of total spirituality to God, and by envisioning the spiritual element in the natural realm as coming from above, [In medieval Aristotelianism it was considered to stem from the Agent Intellect], the gap between the divine and the created was at least, in principle, bridged. Maimonides subscribed to the concept of the intermediary spiritual chain of the separate intellects that transmits the divine flow to the lower world, the last of these intellects functioning as the vicar of God in the mundane realm. Our emphasis on the affinity between the two realms, the divine and the natural, complicates the wellknown assumption of the Maimonidean theology regarding the uncomparability of God to any other being. This problem, which cannot be neglected, complicates the understanding of the topic divine-natural in Maimonides' thought. Neither is this quandary absent from the writings of some other thinkers to be mentioned below. Without wishing to minimize this crucial question, I will nevertheless present the texts that seem to follow the path alluded to by the hints of "the great eagle." It seems that the ultimate conclusion regarding this quandary was drawn by Spinoza in rejecting the principle of emanation that was so important for the medievals, thus allowing a simpler relationship between the natural and the divine. This daring idea of Spinoza was not presented in a clear fashion by any of his Jewish predecessors, no matter how they formulated the gematria which links God and nature, to be surveyed below.

III. ABRAHAM ABULAFIA: ELOHIM AND HA-TEVA'

Among the thirteenth century Kabbalists, no one regarded himself more a Maimonidean than Abraham Abulafia.¹⁶ An author of three commentaries on the *Guide*, and an errant scholar teaching the *Guide* and its secrets in Spain, Greece and Italy, he absorbed the metaphysics and psychology presented by Maimonides and superimposed on them his peculiar kind of Kabbalah, based on the ideal of attaining the prophetic state, i.e. ecstatic and revelatory experiences by combinations of letters. It is therefore no surprise to find in Abulafia's works the first known occurrence of the Gematria *Elohim* is numerically equal to the word *Teva'*, namely Nature. Already in his first extant work *Get Ha-Shemot*, this gematria is found.¹⁷ Discussing those names that may change the order of nature, he describes them as "divine [*Elohim*] [and they] change nature, [since they] are the throne [*ha-Kisse'*] and this is the secret of [the verse]¹⁸". It is the Finger of God ['*Ezba'* *Elohim*], which is the attribute of judgement."¹⁹

The terms Nature, in Hebrew *Ha-Teva'*, and Throne, *Ha-Kisse'* are numerically equal, namely 86; therefore, it cannot be a matter of mere coincidence that in this context, the name *Elohim* occurs. It seems very reasonable to assume that it is related to the two terms in a numerical way since it also has the same numerical value, 86. Let us examine this text in a closer way. The entity that is

conceived as changing nature is the divine finger, which does it through the intermediacy of the divine name *Elohim*.

Prima facie Abulafia subscribes to the already existing view, as expressed for example by R. Abraham ibn Ezra that the divine names may change the course of nature.²⁰ Abulafia was aware that it may be understood, namely, misunderstood, in such a way. This is why he immediately warns that such an understanding is the lot of fools. The multitude is unable to understand the peculiar quality of the divine name, except from the miracles God may perform and no one can openly oppose this view of the vulgus. However, the most profound secret, Abulafia assigns to the *illuminati*, is that the miracles include both a manifest and a hidden dimension, namely a sensible and spiritual aspect.

No doubt, it is clear that the manifest dimension of the miracle, Abulafia mentions in this context the splitting of the Red Sea,²¹ deals with the sensible change in the order of physical nature. However, what is the secret meaning of the power of the divine name? According to Abulafia,²² the intellectual message inherent in the biblical story is more important and can be understood in his days by those who apprehend the truth even better than by those who witnessed the miracle themselves. The ultimate significance of the passage of the Red Sea is the passage from the sensible to the intellectual level, the latter being tantamount to the comprehension of God or His divine name.

On the basis of the above, changing nature may have two different connotations: the physical change, accomplished by the power of the name to disrupt the natural order, and the spiritual meaning, pointing to the force of the name to accomplish another change, leading from sensible apprehension to an intellectual one. In other words, the hidden significance of changing nature refers to the psychic transformation one undergoes, all this in connection with the divine name. This last link between name and inner change is especially crucial for the whole Kabbalah of Abulafia. Using the divine name, namely the letters forming the name, in his combinatory techniques, one is able to attain a profound transformation which may culminate in the achievement of prophecy. Therefore nature represents in Abulafia's as in Maimonides' thought, for both the corporeal as well as the spiritual levels of reality. He concisely formulates his conclusion in a later work, *Sefer Ha-Heshek*.²³ "The tables [of the Law] are a homonym for natural internal issues, since according to the AT BaSH device tables [LHT, according to the biblical spelling] are tantamount to *Kisse'* [throne] which is [in gematria] *Teva'* and for the external issues which are the tables of stones." Therefore, the tables stand for the inner, spiritual aspects of man. The tables of the heart, which are, according to Abulafia, the intellectual and imaginative faculties,²⁴ designated as nature, and for the external objects. Since the two key concepts referred to in the passage from *Sefer Get Ha-Shemot*, Nature and Throne, occur also in *Sefer Ha-Heshek*, it seems reasonable to apply the homonymity from one discussion to another, and articulate Abulafia's secret as pointing to inner, that is spiritual nature.

I have dealt with the meaning of the passage in *Get Ha-Shemot* since it seemingly includes the first significant relationship between Nature and the divine name *Elohim*, apparently based upon the numerical value of the two

words. Since the abovementioned book was written in 1271, it precedes the lengthy discussions occurring in R. Joseph Gikatilla's *Ginnat 'Egoz*, written in 1274, whose specific content and importance will be presented below. However, before turning to Gikatilla, let me complete my presentation of the rich material found in Abulafia's later works, which will reveal the transition from the Maimonidean views to Kabbalah.

In *Sefer Sitrei Torah*, one of Abulafia's three commentaries on the secrets of the *Guide*, he analyzes the various meanings of the word *Ma'aseh*, which may stand for account, work, deed or event.²⁵ Immediately afterwards he mentions the Tables, which "are also called 'Ma'aseh, since they are natural [*tiv'im*] similar to the other divine deeds." Following Maimonides' formulations in the *Guide* I:66, Abulafia envisions the tables as natural and divine at the same time. No wonder that on the next page of this work, Abulafia mentions, in the same statement the three concepts we have already encountered in such a manner that it is obvious that he sees a link between them: I shall quote the Hebrew version:²⁶

"That *Elohim* has created: In [or on] the forms of nature, in [or on] the forms of the Throne." I have translated the verse in *Genesis* literally, with *Elohim* as subject. Nevertheless I doubt whether this is the way Abulafia intended it to be understood. Grammatically, the Hebrew sentence can be understood also in a different way: "That [It] created *Elohim*" namely positing *Elohim* as an object. I indeed prefer this reading, since it permits a very symmetrical reading of Abulafia's statement: "*Asher Bara'*" is numerically identical to "*Bezurot*" both phrases having the value of 704. Then, the remaining terms, *Elohim*, *Ha-Teva'*, *Ha-Kisse'* play the same syntactical role and likewise have the same numerical value. As some other Kabbalists, Abulafia also conceived *Elohim* as the object of the act of creation, not as its agent.²⁷ As such, this name indeed is tantamount for Abulafia with nature, and the gematria is not to be understood as a mere linguistic play, but a way to fortify the identity of the natural and divine proposed by Maimonides in the *Guide*. The fact that this passage is found in a commentary on the secrets of the *Guide*, commenting on Maimonides' statement on the Tables as natural, namely divine, shows that the Kabbalist elaborated upon the view of Maimonides, using his peculiar hermeneutical devices.

Abulafia mentions several times the homonymy of the name *Elohim*, as e.g. in *Sefer Ha-Heshek*:²⁸

The name *Elohim* comprises²⁹ [several meanings]: it is an appellative for the totality of the natural forces; it is part of the names of the First Cause, and it refers also to an attribute of Him, by which He, Glory to Him, is separated from other entities.

This conception of *Elohim* as the generic name of all the natural forces, is congenial within the understanding of this name as an object in the first verse of the Pentateuch. In the beginning, the natural order was created, and only afterwards the various divisions appeared. As such, Abulafia's view is close to

the Talmudic-Midrashic one which holds that God wanted to create the world with the attribute of Judgement, namely with the name of *Elohim*.³⁰ According to this kabbalist, Nature is connected to this divine name but also to the idea of limit; In a commentary on his own prophetic works, Abulafia presents together the following words:³¹ "*Elohim, Hamevattel, Ha-Teva', Hamugbal ... Galgal Yod ... Galgal Dio, Galgal 'Asiri.*" All these words have the numerical value of 86, apparently pointing to related or similarly functioning concepts. Here *Elohim* and Nature are understood as the spiritual sphere, which is the tenth sphere, but nevertheless as a limited entity. It seems that Abulafia considered the emergence of all the natural forces to be the result of the action, may be movements of the first sphere, in our text related as the tenth sphere,³² according to a medieval view that envisioned all the movements in the terrestrial worlds as effects of movements in cosmic spheres.³³ Describing Nature as identical with the spiritual realm, Abulafia is manifestly coherent with his previously mentioned view in specifying the order of nature, rather than Nature itself.

We may summarize the two main directions of Abulafia's understanding of the meaning of the equation *Elohim=Teva'*: it stands for the inner, spiritual nature and for the external, hypostatic view of nature as well as the order of nature, i.e. a spiritual realm, created in the beginning, and regulating the natural processes, which are, thereby, considered also divine.

IV. R. JOSEPH GIKATILLA'S EARLY WRITINGS

In a short autobiographical passage, Abulafia mentions Gikatilla as one of his students to whom he taught the *Guide*.³⁴ This seemed to have happened in the early seventies of the 13th century, when Abulafia was wandering in Castile. Gikatilla's early work, *Ginnat 'Egoz*, a kabbalistic book related to Abulafia's peculiar type of Kabbalah, and even more to Abulafia's sources,³⁵ points to the affinity between *Elohim* and *Teva'*, God and Nature on several occasions.

Nowhere is this affinity expressed precisely as a gematria, as in the case of Abulafia, nor is this affinity directly connected with the Maimonidean view of natural and divine. Moreover, one main direction of Maimonides' and Abulafia's interpretation of the meaning of this affinity, the psychological one, seems to be totally absent in Gikatilla's works. The spiritual interest of this Castilian Kabbalist did not include the prophetic inclinations of his former teacher of the *Guide*, and he suppressed Abulafia's inner interpretation of the equation *Elohim=Ha-Teva'*. I see no reason to assume that Gikatilla arrived by himself at the same gematrical identity, though it is still possible that he, and Abulafia, used unknown common sources. However, until some solid evidence regarding the existence of such source will surface, I assume that Abulafia transmitted to his students his view on correct manner of reading the *Guide*, including our gematria.

What remained from this hypothetical transmission is only the hypostatical understanding of the relationship of Nature and *Elohim*, which Gikatilla elaborated in a detailed way, in some of his early writings. Let me discuss the

most important aspects of this conception.

Like Abulafia before him, Gikatilla used the same triple gematria of *Elohim*, *Ha-Teva'* and *Kisse'*.³⁶

The creation of the world is the act of nature, whose secret is *Elohim*, since nature is the nature of the throne ... Understand that the name *Elohim* emerged with the creation of nature whereas the Tetragrammaton did not emerge with the creation of the world, since it is [a name] unique to Him.

In line with Abulafia's interpretation of the name *Elohim* as the order of the creational processes, Gikatilla writes:³⁷

At the beginning [He] created *Elohim*, namely at the beginning of nature the throne was created, by means of the name *Elohim*, which emerged with the creation of [the world]. And it is written that *Elohim* created and not the Tetragrammaton created; see how the Tetragrammaton³⁸ is hidden in the creation, and the name which is an appellative for creation is the name *Elohim*, which is connected to nature, since by the intermediacy of it all the natures [i.e. essences] were impressed in the account of Creation.

The source of the natures, or the essences mentioned in the preceding quotation is the Tetragrammaton, which is understood by Gikatilla as the generator of essences, but not as the proximate creator of the world. Nevertheless, in the same work, this Kabbalist refers to the highest divine aspect using the following phrase "He impresses all the natures [i.e. essences] with a lasting nature." It is obvious that this lasting character of the divine activity is considered by Gikatilla as the reason for the denotation of Nature applied to the divine activity in the creational process. Therefore, the generation of the essences is indeed attributed to God, but the impressing of these essences, the natures as the Kabbalist calls them, is regarded as the prerogative of that divine aspect named *Elohim* or Nature. Gikatilla specifies that the name *Elohim* expresses the idea of force,³⁹ which becomes manifest in the lasting character of the natures impressed in matter, in the creational process. Therefore, Nature is that denomination attributed to God by virtue of the impregnation of essences in the act of creation. This name occurs together with the phrase "impresses natures" a fact that will be elaborated below.⁴⁰

In the same period when Gikatilla wrote his *Ginnat Egoz* he also composed a commentary on the first chapter of Genesis. There we also find a certain distinction between a highest essence of God and one referred to as *Elohim* and Nature:⁴¹

Know that every nature bears the seal⁴² of the King, and there is no real existence to any nature except by the existence of *'Anokhi*. However, the secret of *'Anokhi* is different from the secret of *Teva'* since the category⁴³ of *'Anokhi* is that of *'A[leph]* whereas that of *Teva'* is *B[et]* in order to hint that *'Anokhi* is [equivalent to] *Yesod A* but *Teva'* is *Binyan B*⁴⁴ ... And do not

argue from either the secret of *Kisse'*⁴⁵ or from the secret of *Elohim*, since the issue of *Elohim* is different from them, since every *Kisse'* testifies that there is *Yesod A* and likewise every Nature and every *Elohim*.

The difference between the *'Anokhi* and *Teva'* seems to be of another type than that between the Tetragrammaton and the name *Elohim* in *Ginnat Egoz*. The Tetragrammaton stands for the divine Being when standing in Himself, *Elohim* for the divine action in the process of creation. In the last quotation, the appellative *Elohim* stands for an entity that is separated from God in a distinct way; it is to be identified with the separate intellects, as they are conceived as identical with the *Binyan*,⁴⁶ the structure mentioned in our quotation. Therefore, it seems that in this case, Gikatilla, like his master Abulafia, assumed that the hypostatical status of nature was identical with *Elohim*.

It should be mentioned that the previous views concerning the relationship between *Elohim* and Nature occur in different theological contexts, in texts influenced by Gikatilla, written under the overt impact of *Ginnat Egoz*. There, *Elohim* is understood as the first created thing, identified also as Nature, a stand identical with that expressed in his commentary on the first chapter of Genesis. To a certain extent, this status of the entity designated as *Elohim* is reminiscent also of the view of Abulafia mentioned above, where *Elohim* occurring in the first verse of the Pentateuch is regarded as the object, rather than the subject of the verse.

The hypostatic state of Nature as a separate entity became obvious in an anonymous Kabbalistic treatise *Eshkol Ha-Kofer*, written under the impact of Gikatilla. There we read in the context of the phrase "the sea of wisdom" as follows:⁴⁷

All the rivers run to the sea,⁴⁸ because the vitality of all creatures comes from Him, and returns to Him. The secret of *Elohim* points to nature in the account of creation and in the book of Ecclesiastes it is demonstrated in the verse "and the sea is not full, since its existence depends upon the other, namely on the name of God, Blessed be He ... and the secret of the sea is *Shi'ur Qomah*⁴⁹ and whoever understands the secret of [the verse] all the rivers run to the sea he will understand why the name *Elohim* is comprised of nature.

The anonymous Kabbalist identifies nature and *Elohim* with the supernal sea and the divine anthropomorphic structure, *Shi'ur Qomah*, as well as the First Created Entity, the divine glory, the divine throne and the world of the intellect.⁵⁰ Part of the previous list of attributes is congenial with an hypostatical understanding of *Elohim* in a commentary on the *Guide*, probably authored by Gikatilla himself.⁵¹ However, in this commentary, the hypostatical conception of nature does not occur.

Also, stemming from the circle of Gikatilla, possibly being part of one this kabbalist's works, is a passage found in R. Meir Aldabi's work *Shevilei Emunah*.⁵² Here the name *Elohim* is understood as formed from two linguistic

elements: *Elém* and *Yah*,⁵³ the meaning of which is that this name represents a collection of natures, since, as this author explicitly states, *Elohim* is numerically equivalent to *Ha-Teva'*.

Ginnat Egoz was an influential Kabbalistic text. The occurrence of an identity between the divine name and nature in such a text contributed to the diffusion of this view. I would like to mention here only some of the interesting instances of the recurrence of this gematria.

In R. Bahya ben Asher's classical *Commentary on the Pentateuch*,⁵⁴ he paraphrases the view of Gikatilla in an anonymous way; what is however interesting in this usage is the way Gikatilla's view is introduced; it is adduced as the plain meaning of a verse, '*'al-derekh hapeshat*', not as a Kabbalistic interpretation!

Another major Kabbalistic book, R. Moses Cordovero's *Pardes Rimmonim* also resorts to this gematria.⁵⁵ It seems that this Kabbalist combines the stand of Gikatilla as expressed in *Ginnat Egoz*, with that of the same author in his later work, *Sha'arei Orah*.⁵⁶ The divine name *Elohim* is directly related to the attribute of strict justice, while the identity of nature with this attribute is presented as pointing to the account of creation. The attribute of Grace is understood as the divine force maintaining creation, and at the same time, the source of the miracles that change the course of nature. Again, in another of Cordovero's works, the magical attempt to break the course of nature is regarded as annoying the divine attribute designated as *Elohim*, by pressing it to change its regular course.

Under the apparent influence of Cordovero, R. Eliah de Vidas, in his *Reshit Hokhmah*, wrote that the righteous are capable to change the course of nature, and that the attribute of grace can change the course of nature.⁵⁸

V. REVERBERATIONS OF ELOHIM=HA-TEVA' IN PHILOSOPHICAL SOURCES

From the previous discussions, it seems reasonable to assume that the emergence of the gematria is the result of the Kabbalistical interpretation of a philosophical position. Already by the end of the 13th century, a Kabbalist attributed the gematria to Kabbalists in plural, an interesting testimony regarding the dissemination of this gematria.⁵⁹ Indeed, the Kabbalistic formulation penetrated also non-Kabbalistic writings, a fact that demonstrates that the speculative dimension of this relationship was congenial as well to other types of sources.

In the commentary on the secrets alluded to in R. Abraham ibn Ezra's commentary to the Pentateuch, wrongly attributed to R. Joseph Caspi, we find a highly interesting passage on our topic. The anonymous author indicates that:⁶⁰

All the sages have written a work named *Gematria* [sic] and they counted that [the word] *Elohim* has the value of *Ha-Teva'*, and the philosophers found that they [sic] called the human intellect [by the name] natural form. In such a manner Rabbi [Maimonides] commented – in his important book, when

commenting on *Zelem* and *Demut*, in the first part – [when dealing with the verse] *Bezalmenu bidemutenu*, [In our image, in our likeness] [that is] the natural form, since it maintains the essence of the body, by whom it receives its essence ... and the degree of *Ishim*⁶¹ is called by this name since it speaks with men, and it appears as men. Also it is said that it is called [by the name of] *Elohim*, because it flows onto the human intellect that is called Nature, since it is in him and it maintains him.

This passage includes several important ideas to be considered more closely. Firstly, the anonymous author recognizes that the source of the gematria is a book written by "all the sages." At the same time he argues that this identity is to be understood in its psychological dimension, already apparent in Abraham Abulafia's works, as understood from the *Guide*. Again, using another work of Maimonides, he interprets the generic name *Elohim* when applied to a class of angels, as the source of the influx that reaches the human intellect, referred again as Nature. Possibly, the passage includes an allusion to the identify of the essence of the human and the Agent Intellect, conspicuously referred to as *Elohim* and *Ishim*.

According to the beginning of the passage, the gematria appeared in a work, itself named *Gematria*. I am not aware of the occurrence of this numerical identity in a work having this name. However, the assessment that "all the sages" wrote this work may point to a certain unanimity as far as this gematria is concerned.

Who exactly those sages may be is not clear at all. However, it seems that one may at least locate formulations that include implicit affinity between nature and the name *Elohim*. Take for example, R. Isaac Albalag, a late 13th and early 14th century philosopher, who describes the "world of nature as the special place for the rule of the powers of the spheres, called *Elohim*." This is the reason why this world of nature is also called "the house of God" [*Beit Elohim*.]⁶² A comparison of the biblical phrase "house of God" with the philosophical expression "the world of nature" leads to the conclusion that house is parallel to world, and nature to *Elohim*.

More conspicuous is the view of a late 14th and early 15th century North African Jewish author, R. Yehudah Carasani. In his *Aron Ha-'Edut* he maintains that:⁶³

The angels are called *Elohim* ... and behold *Elohim* in gematria is *Ha-Teva'*, since it is called angel, and the angels are called *Elohim* ... since the act of God on the earth is by the angels called *Elohim* and they are the first chariot.

As in the case of Albalag, Carasani also applies the name *Elohim* to the angelic powers which constitute the divine activity in the terrestrial zone.

In the middle of the 15th century, an anonymous author, probably in Italy wrote, under the cumulative influence of Maimonides⁶⁴ and Abulafia as follows:⁶⁵

Whatever existence comes during the seventh day [of creation] is a natural one and this is alluded in the verse⁶⁷ that *Elohim* created in order to make, namely that *Elohim* created them in order to make from then onward, since on the sixth day he accomplished his entire work, Blessed be He, and the secret of *Elohim* is *Ha-Teva'* as if it were said that Nature created from then onward.

This is the first time, as far as I know, that someone not only uses the gematria implying that God is equivalent to nature, but also places nature in a biblical verse in lieu of the divine name. The same author overtly posits nature as another term for the divine will, both of them being interchangeable.⁶⁸

A synthesis between a view of Ibn Ezra, that of Maimonides and of the gematria we have been dealing with here, is found in R. Abraham ibn Migash's *Kevod Elohim*. According to this 16th century thinker:⁶⁹

"It is the finger of God" namely a natural issue, determined by the constellation ... and it is written that the tables are the work of God ... since everything done in the seven days of creation is said to have been made by the finger of God [*Elohim*] ... and *Elohim* in gematria is *Ha-Teva'*.

Last but not least; R. Yehudah Moscato, a famous Italian preacher in the second part of the 16th century openly refers to God in these terms:⁷⁰

He, Blessed be He, is called Nature truly ... since He is impressing all the natures of the creatures with His signet.

Though the gematria is absent here, we can easily see that the description of God as Naturator, combines both the Mishnaic simile, [to be discussed below] of God as impressing His creatures, in the original *Tovea'*, with his description of real nature.

Before leaving the survey of the most important discussions of the gematria *Elohim=Ha-Teva'* in the pre-Spinozian period, I would like to mention the fact that a long series of Hasidic passages deal with this gematria. The Hasidic material is much more rich than all the pre-Hasidic evidence treated above. However, the essence of the Hasidic discussion represents a combination of the theosophical-theurgical occasionalism together with the pantheistic trends implicit in the philosophical texts and in the philosophical Kabbalah dealt with above. An analysis of the Hasidic understanding of the gematria is fascinating in itself and requires a special treatment that will take into account the spinozistic development as well. Here I shall mention only one important Hasidic passage, that points to an earlier, albeit still unlocated view, regarding the connection between the gematria and the notion of contraction, *Zimzum*. According to an early Hasidic tradition:⁷¹

God, the Lord of the Hosts, is as a sun and a shield⁷² ... just as it is impossible to contemplate the sun, out of greatness of the brightness of its light, except by using a shield and a separating veil ... so also is the case the Tetragrammaton, whose light is bright and thus needs a contraction and limitation into the name *Elohim*, in gematria *Ha-Teva'*, which is as a shield.

Now, the idea that the name *Elohim* is a shield for the Tetragrammaton occurs also in the classical kabbalistic sources.⁷³ The view that the infinite light has to be limited as part of the process of comprehension, and as a part of the creative process is also a classical Kabbalistic conception, from the time of R. Isaac Luria.⁷⁴ What however, seems to be of special interest in the Hasidic passage, is the fact that nature is presented as a contraction of the divine infinite. It is the divine in a contracted form. The opposition between natural versus divine is transcended here by positing a contraction as the explanation of the passage between the two divine modes of existence. This occurrence of the notions Nature, *Elohim* and contraction together, may therefore point to a conception parallel to Spinoza's understanding of *natura naturata* as the limited mode of God as nature. Indeed, it one could locate a pre-Spinozistic source that would combine the gematria *Elohim=Ha-Teva'* with the Kabbalistic contraction, it would be an amazing antecedent for understanding nature as a limited aspect of God. However, for the time being, such a view cannot be located before the middle of the 18th century. Nevertheless, such a combination is possible, and in fact the gematria which appears in Abulafia, *Elohim=Ha-Teva'=Hamugbal* namely the finite⁷⁵ seems to hint at the probability that such a vision of nature as a limited mode of the divine was possible. In any case Abulafia uses exactly the same verb as the Hasidic passage does, *GBL*, in order to convey the idea of limitation.

It should also be remarked that since the writings of R. Azriel of Gerone, the term '*Olam Mutba'* the natured World, recurs in Kabbalistic works symbolising the last sefirah or configuration of the lower sefirot.⁷⁶ Such an appellative for a divine realm is indeed interesting in the context of a discussion of the possibility that a Kabbalistic concept of nature as a limited divine aspect was in existence sometime before Spinoza.

The previous examples are conclusive evidence for the usages of the gematria not only by Kabbalists but also by some authors who might have been influenced by Kabbalah without being Kabbalists themselves.

What seems to be the common denominator of most of the preceding authors, is the fact that they subscribed, when using the gematria, to philosophical types of theologies. This point seems to me to be of certain importance. A perusal of the classical Kabbalistic literature written by Kabbalists belonging to the theosophical-theurgical Kabbalah, demonstrates that this type of mysticism is reticent towards gematria in general and towards the specific gematria on God and nature in particular. So, for example, this gematria is absent in the voluminous classic of Spanish kabbalah, the book of the Zohar. Even more illuminating is the total absence of the gematria in the later works of R. Joseph Gikatilla. As soon as his Kabbalah turned into a

theosophy, as in his *Sefer Sha'arei Zedek* and *Sha'arei 'Orah*, he stopped pointing out the affinity between God and nature, even in contexts where such a statement was natural in the light of his earlier theological stand.⁷⁷ This change, together with the absence of this device in the theosophical writings of R. Moses de Leon and R. Joseph of Hamadan, are clear symptoms of an aversion toward the identification of God or even of one of his attributes, with nature.

It seems that this conclusion is generally correct as far as the second important body of theosophical literature is concerned, the Lurianic Kabbalah. The division between the two major types of Kabbalistic thinking, regarding the usage of the affinity or sometimes similarity between God and nature, reflect, in my opinion, the basic attitudes of those two types of Kabbalah to Maimonides in general. Like Maimonides, and ostensibly under his influence, Abulafia, the early Gikatilla, and the philosophically oriented authors mentioned above, prefer spiritualistic theology which emphasizes the simplicity of God, as against theosophical thought based on the fundamental assumption that the divine also comprises a multitude of divine manifestations named *sefirot*. The latter was conceived, as we have already mentioned at the beginning of our essay, as the super-nature which is, at the same time, the object of Kabbalistic study, of mystical experience, and of ritual.

However, beyond the different approaches of the theosophical versus the more philosophical Kabbalah to the gematria, it seems that in the two cases the final result, as far as the actual attitude of Kabbalists to nature itself is concerned, is not so great. According to Maimonides himself, nature was an important avenue, and according to S. Pines' view,⁷⁸ the single way open to the apprehension of the reality of the divine. Therefore, actual interest in natural phenomena was a religious requirement, almost an obligation. The study of nature was fraught with religious dimensions, and turned into an indispensable domain of speculation. Indeed, Maimonides was well acquainted with some sciences, a fact that was certainly in line with his vision of the natural as divine actions.

The Kabbalists, on the other hand were not interested in nature as an actual domain of contemplation. The theosophists among them envisaged the sefirotic realm as more dignified than the material, natural one. Their occasionalistic proclivities prevented them from being preoccupied by events that were considered to be accidents. Rather they were concerned with the proper knowledge of the supernal divine manifestations and the way to influence them by intentional Kabbalistic performance of the commandments. On the other hand, those Kabbalists who were interested in the ideas of Maimonides, as Abulafia and Gikatilla were, succumbed to a certain kind of speculation that brought them to abandon the practical interest in nature itself. Their universe was primarily a linguistic realm and understanding the numerical relationship between the various divine names and philosophical concepts was considered to be a higher preoccupation than the actual science of nature itself. The laws that rule nature could, according to these Kabbalists, be deduced in an easier way by applying the device of *gematria*, *notaricon* or *temurah* to the canonic

texts than to study the alien sciences.⁷⁹ Indeed, Abulafia summarized this situation when distinguishing between the logic of Aristotle and the inner logic of Kabbalah.⁸⁰ The former is appropriate to the natural realm, the latter to the theological one, which can be extrapolated from the Bible by using the combination of letters that characterized his Kabbalah. In other words, two types of super-natural orders were considered by Kabbalists to surpass that of nature, the sefirotic and the linguistic one, provided that they were in the possession of the clues to these types of mystical universes. Accordingly their interest in nature was reduced to the minimum. Precisely because of their conception that nature represents a divine kind of activity, the Kabbalists attempted to deepen their understanding of this divine facet, neglecting nature as a possible focus of study or contemplation. Instead, they concentrated their spiritual efforts on speculations regarding the components of the cosmos, the divine letters according to *Sefer Yezirah*, or with those archetypes that govern it, the *sefirot*.

We may describe Spinoza's place in the line of the discussions of the relationship between God and nature as a thinker who disentangled the importance of the linguistic proof, the gematria, and allowed the discussion of this relationship a place in itself, separated from demonstration from biblical sources or from mystical hermeneutics based on the unique qualities of the Hebrew language.⁷⁷

I would like to address now the question of Giordano Bruno's influence on Spinoza. Indeed the Nolan thinker also posited a pantheistic understanding of the relationship between God and Nature. From the chronological point of view it is not difficult to see in Bruno a possible source of Spinoza and I do not question this possibility at all. However, as I have attempted to show elsewhere,⁸¹ it is quite possible that Bruno was influenced both directly and indirectly by Jewish sources when dealing with topics concerning the relationship of God and nature. If indeed Spinoza was aware of Bruno's views, the existence of certain ideas in Jewish sources could only facilitate the appropriation of certain aspects of this thinking.

It might also be relevant to compare the Kabbalistic conception of the identity of God and nature with the Christian medieval view of nature as Goddess.⁸² What strikes me in the perusal of the Jewish texts is the total absence of any personification of nature. In contrast to the rich Christian presentation of Nature as a hypostatic entity, having the attributes of a person, the Jewish sources are rather reticent to indulge in such a manner of discourse when dealing with nature. This absence is, however, not the result of the rejection of hypostatic conceptions or the fear of personification. Such types of thought and writing are rather common in Kabbalah. However, the peculiar distribution of interest in nature in the various Kabbalistic types of literature is the main reason for this absence. The philosophically oriented Kabbalah, which indeed adopted the identification of *Elohim*-Nature, rejected the mythical way of thinking in favor of a much more abstract presentation, and at the same time a static conception of the orderliness of nature. On the other hand, the theosophical-theurgical Kabbalah, which encourage symbolic and hypo-

static thought emphasizing a dynamic vision of reality, ignored the identification that could be transformed into a type of thought similar to the Christian concept of Nature as Goddess.

Because the gematria *Elohim=Ha-Teva'* occurs in so many texts, it is difficult to locate one specific source for Spinoza's identification of *Deus* and *natura*. However, in order to attempt to identify such a probable source it would be worthwhile to follow the history of a pair of concepts in existence long before Spinoza but recurrent in his works. I refer to the terms *Natura naturans* and *natura naturata*. As scholars have already pointed out, these terms recur in the scholastic literature and it is reasonable to assume that indeed the 13th century authors using these terms could have influenced Spinoza. However, the origin, or origins of these terms are obscure and the attempts to explain the emergence of these terms from the translation of Averroistic sources from Arabic to Latin are, in my opinion, far-fetched.⁸³ I would like to trace another development for these terms, basing my proposal on the same line of argumentation I have followed in the previous discussion.

In classical Latin, the noun *Natura* did not produce a derivative verb. *Naturare*, as the possible infinitive form for *Naturans* or *naturata* is unknown before the end of the 12th century, if one accepts the arguments of the scholars. Only at the beginning of the 13th century the form *natura naturata* appears in a translation from Averroes' commentary to Aristotle's *De Caelo*. On the basis of this fact, Henry A. Lucks concluded that the Latin translations of Averroes are to be considered as the source of the scholastic terms.⁸⁴ Though the evidence adduced by this scholar is indeed interesting for the emergence of the scholastic terminology, the question of the origin of the concepts and the language developments that preceded the scholastic usage is still an open issue. P. Kraus has already proposed that the Arab forms *Tab'* and *Matbu'* are the predecessors of the later *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*.⁸⁵ These terms occur already in the writings of Jabir ibn Hayyan, the famous Gaber of the Latin medieval literature. However, it would, however, be pertinent to remark that the scholastic terms are composite ones, whereas the Arab ones are simple, a fact that complicates the explanation proposed by Kraus. However, the Hebrew noun *Teva'*, derived from the verb *TB'*, also has produced various verbal and adjectival forms before the 13th century. Moreover, late 12th and middle 13th century Hebrew texts already use expressions very similar and in some instances identical to the Latin *Natura naturans* and *natura naturata*. In light of this fact, which will be elucidated immediately, the possibility of an influence of the Jewish sources on scholasticism should be examined in detail, as a complementary source of influence, parallel to the Muslim philosophy, and as a probable avenue of the penetration of this type of nomenclature. This matter cannot be settled here. No doubt, the possibility that those sources which influenced Latin scholasticism might have influenced Spinoza, is still an open one.

It seems that the usage of terms parallel to *Natura naturans* and *natura naturata* was used already by one of the first Jewish philosophers, R. Sa'adiah Gaon; in his Arabic *Commentary on Sefer Yezirah, The Book of Creation*, he wrote on the Creator that "He impressed each of the elements by a nature that is inherent to it," and in another place he mentions the elements that were impressed by natures.⁸⁶ The Hebrew translation of this text, accomplished, so it seems, in the 12th century, done by a certain R. Moses ben Josef, renders the crucial terms by the phrases *Tava' Tive'o* and *Tube'a*.⁸⁷ That is to say that both the active and the passive usages of the verb *TB'* were in usage when indicating the impressing of the essence of a certain thing in matter. In precisely the same context, the same roots used by Maimonides, in his *Code*,⁸⁸ when dealing with the natural tendency of the four elements to return to their natural places, Maimonides writes

Their trajectory is not according to their thought or will, but a custom that was impressed in them, and a nature which was impressed upon them.

The Hebrew phrase, translated as "a nature which was impressed in them" reads: "ve-*Teva'* *shenitba'* *bahem*." Here we find the noun *Teva'*, together with a verb derived from the same root, both forms of rendering the act of impressing of a peculiar form on matter which thereby becomes the peculiar element.

However, the usage of the verb *TB'* in order to convey an act of creation is, as we have seen, not new with Maimonides; he, and apparently also R. Solomon ibn Gabirol already had used a similar form in a creative context. In one of his poems ibn Gabirol wrote:⁸⁹

He [God] impressed [*Tava'*] six extremes [i.e. dimensions], sealed by His [divine] name.

The six extremes, *qezawwot*, are connected to the creation of the world in the source of Ibn Gabirol, *Sefer Yezirah*, the ancient Jewish *Book of Creation*. Composed in the middle of the 11th century, the quoted line testifies to the usage of the verb *TB'* in order to convey the concept of creation; it is reasonable to assume that the *Commentary on Sefer Yezirah* of R. Sa'adiah was one source for the peculiar creative usage of this verb.⁹⁰ A contemporary of Ibn Gabirol, the poet R. Benjamin ben Shemuel, used the same verb in connection to creation.⁹¹

The nature of the finest of dust, arose in His thought
He mingled blood and water together and He embellished his form
And before He breathed in him a breath, his image was impressed as a golem

The precise meaning of these lines is not clear. Indeed the occurrence of the form *Teva'* already in the 11th century is rather exceptional, as is the form *hubta'* – impressed. However, we cannot doubt the fact that the passive form of

the verb *TB'* is not a late misunderstanding, since already in the middle of the 13th century, the Latin translation of these verses was made on the basis of the version which included the form *mutba'* that was correctly translated as “*erat impressa.*”⁹²

In the philosophical language of the translators from the Tibonian family, both the active and the passive forms of the verb occur in connection with the formation of a certain thing. So, for example, R. Yehudah ibn Tibbon translates a sentence of R. Bahya ibn Pakuda:⁹³

God has already impressed in its nature love and kindness.

R. Shemuel ibn Tibbon, the son of the former translator, renders a sentence of Maimonides, from his *Guide*, as follows:⁹⁴

When God, Blessed be He, created the reality and impressed on it these natures.

Thus, it was a part of the Hebrew philosophical terminology to express the impression of a certain quality or the nature of a thing using the various forms of the verb *TB'*, sometimes attributing this action to God directly. Maimonides indeed is not innovative when using the verb *TB'*. His formulation in the *Code* is not clear enough. He did not mention who exactly is the subject of his sentence, namely the agent that impressed the nature of the elements. According to his cosmology, it is reasonable to assume that it is the Agent Intellect, which is the source of all the forms and the factor that changes the forms.

Before proceeding with our discussion of the impressing or stamping of nature or natures, when using the Hebrew very *TB'*, it is pertinent to adduce here the Rabbinic simile of God as stamping all men with the signet which, in a wondrous way, produces another sample every time. According to the Mishnah:⁹⁵

A man could impress one hundred stamps with a single signet and all would be identical. God, the King of Kings, the Holy One Blessed by He, stamps every man with Adam's signet. Yet no one resembles another.

The signet and the verb translated as stamp, impress, are derived from the root *TV'*; the relationship of this type of metaphor to the medieval discussions of nature as a divine act was duly emphasized by J. Faur, who elaborated on the affinity between the ancient views, including Philo, and the medieval usage, in Maimonides, and later on in the controversy that arose around the speech of David Nieto.⁹⁶ However interesting his remarks may be, they do not deal with the emergence of the phrases *natura naturata* or *natura naturans* nor with the Kabbalistic material that serves, as we shall try to demonstrate below, as a possible link between Maimonides and the later usages, especially that of Spinoza. What seems to be important in the mishnaic statement quoted above is the fact that God is referred to using the root *TB'* in order to describe His

activity. Assuming that the ancient simile was very influential, it is easy to understand why the medieval authors had no problem in applying the very *TB'* to divine activity. It is obvious that there is a conspicuous semantic shift in the meaning of this verb. According to the philosophical usage of the verb, it refers to the creative process in general and not only with that of human nature. Furthermore, it refers now to the essence of the created entity, the form of the creatures in the Aristotelian understanding of the term, rather than the outer resemblance, as in the mishnaic passage.

The usage of the very *TB'* in a passive form, when referring to the formation of a certain entity, is found in one of Abraham Abulafia's commentaries to the secrets of the *Guide*. This Kabbalist asserts that the forms of all entities are determined by the divine name impressed on them. Ostensively, there is a close affinity between the impression of the name and the essence of the entities. As we have already seen in the citation from Ibn Gabirol's poem, and as we shall see in Gikatilla's presentation of this topic, that the divine names are impressing their natures on things. In one of his earliest works, *Maftean Ha-Reayion* Abulafia uses the phrase *Shem mutba'*, the name that is impressed in the mind, namely an intelligible issue.⁹⁷

R. Joseph Gikatilla was much more interested in these phrases. In the same work, where he posits the divine appellative *Elohim* as tantamount to Nature, he uses the Hebrew phrases several times which are the precise counterparts of the scholastic terms. So, for example, he writes:⁹⁸

The appellative *Elohim*, which points to the innovation of nature since He, blessed be He, acted all the features, [and] He impressed all the natures, and He extracted them from the essence of his name.

God is referred as impressing all the natures, in Hebrew “*Shehitbi' a kol hatevaim.*” As the Kabbalist indicates, these natures stem from the divine name, a statement that can reasonably be understood as implying that nature is inherent in the divine essence. Though the appellative *Elohim* is applied to God only in connection to creation, the very existence of the natures in the midst of the divine seems to be evident to Gikatilla.

What is characteristic of the impressing act of the Divinity in the creative process is that it has a lasting effect. So, for example, we learn from another discussion of the same Kabbalist:⁹⁹

Every nature is lasting, remaining in the same position, since it is impressed by the name *Elohim*, which signifies power, strength and existence.

Gikatilla uses the passive form to indicate the divine activity. The nature is impressed, in Hebrew, “*Beheioto mutba' bashem Elohim.*” Two words before the form “*Mutba'*” the term *teba'* is mentioned. Here, as in other instances, it is obvious that the adjective “impressed” is connected to nature or, more precisely, natures. So, for example, we learn in another passage, that “these natures are impressed by the name *Elohim*, they [stem] from the Tetragramma-

ton.”¹⁰⁰ Again, the inmost aspect of the Deity is presented as the ultimate source of the natures that are impressed by *Elohim*. The way Gikatilla employs the terms *Teva'*, *matbia'*, *teva'im*, *tava'im mutba'im*, as describing the divine activity in the processes of creation, ostensibly provides a clear distinction between the primordial aspect of God, designated by the Tetragrammaton, which is the origin of all the forms and natures that are impressed later on in the act of creation and another divine aspect, designated as *Elohim*, which is explicitly connected with creation and the emergence of nature. It seems reasonable to assume that the active usage of the verb *TB'* as well as its passive form, are attributed to the acts of *Elohim*; on the other hand, the active form of this verb seems to be in usage only as far as the Tetragrammaton is involved. It is noteworthy that the discussions of Gikatilla in *Ginnat egoz* which use the terms *hitbia'* and *hutba'* are more numerous than what was quoted here, and in fact, they are apparently the largest elaboration on the issue of creation employing these terms in Hebrew literature.¹⁰¹

I should like to indicate that the phrases, *Teva' matbia'* and *Teva' mutba'*, or very close variations of them, recur in Jewish Kabbalistic as well as philosophical texts from the end of the 13th century to the time of Spinoza. They appear, for example, in the writings of R. Yehudah Carasani,¹⁰² R. Shem Tov ibn Shaprut,¹⁰³ and R. Isaac Abrabanel.¹⁰⁴ It seems that we may conclude that the scholastic terminology of *natura naturans* and *natura naturata* were not the source of Jewish writers as the usage of the authors quoted above testifies. If so, then the scholastic origin of Spinoza's usage of the terms is not self-evident, as the presentation of H.A. Wolfson lets us believe.¹⁰⁵ The problem indeed becomes much more complex if we also introduce the Hebrew material, which may have served as a reasonable source for both scholasticism and Spinozism. As a common source, the Jewish terms were both close enough and equally available to Spinoza.

Moreover, in the Kabbalistic sources, there is at least one element, crucial for the thought of Spinoza, which seems to be absent from the Christian texts. In the scholastic sources, *natura naturata* is identical with the natural, created, and limited realm that has nothing divine in it. As such it is overtly different from Spinoza's understanding of *natura naturata*, that implies a divine, albeit a limited, dimension. According to the Kabbalistic texts, especially Gikatilla's *Ginnat Egoz*, nature is referred to as identical with *Elohim*. Though this identification is less overt as in the works of Spinoza, it is at least implicit in the formulations used by Gikatilla. As a starting point, they may serve as a reasonable source for the development that culminated with Spinoza's articulated thought about God as both *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*.

Let me address now the historical question: though Maimonides' phrases were apparently available to Spinoza, they are much more the nature of hints than clear formulations. On the other hand, in *Ginnat Egoz*, the terminology is not only closer to the 17th century philosopher: in these sources, the relationship between *Elohim* and nature is expressed in an unequivocal way. Abulafia's works, preserved in manuscripts alone were hardly available to the 17th century philosopher. However, in the case of Gikatilla, the situation is

drastically different. His book was considered as a classic of Kabbalah and was printed at Hanau in 1615. Thus it was, so I assume, easily accessible in the next generation for those who had any interest in Kabbalah in Western Europe. Though we have no hard evidence for the acquaintance of Spinoza with this Kabbalistic work of Gikatilla, I assume that the chances are good that Spinoza studied Gikatilla's work.¹⁰⁶ If this is the case our hypothesis may open the way for a more detailed and positive reevaluation of the influence of Kabbalah on Spinoza, referring this time to concepts that are crucial for the philosophy of this author.

Interestingly, the only author that adumbrated our conclusion was H.A. Lucks, who noted the discrepancies between the Spinozistic usages of the terms *Natura naturans* and *natura naturata* and their meaning in the scholastic tradition. Therefore, he assumed, without proposing any precise source for his hypothesis, that Spinoza's sources for his peculiar understanding of these terms may be the same as the sources of the scholastic nomenclature, sources that he surmises to be in the Judeo-Arabic tradition. However, the description of these possible sources as “Jewish scholasticism”¹⁰⁷ needs to be modified, allowing for the important role of the mystical understanding of philosophy.¹⁰⁸

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Hebrew University

NOTES

¹ See Idel, “Maimonides and Kabbalah”.

² This is especially true in the case of ecstatic kabbalah, a fact that is proven also by the following discussions.

³ Ed. J. Finkel, New York, 1939, pp. 33–39, par., 48–50.

⁴ See D. Berger, “Miracles and Natural Order in Nahmanides,” in ed. I. Twersky, *Rabbi Moses Nahmanides [Ramban]: Explorations in His Religious and Literary Virtuosity*, Cambridge, Mass., 1983, pp. 106–128, and G. Scholem, *Les Origines de la Kabbale*, Paris, 1966, pp. 477–478.

⁵ Like R. Bahya Ibn Pakuda, *Hovot HaLevavot*, Gate II, Ch. 4.

⁶ H.A. Wolfson, *Repercussions of the Kalam in Jewish Philosophy*, Cambridge, Mass., 1979, pp. 171–99.

⁷ See M. Idel, *Kabbalah – New Perspectives*, New Haven, 1989, Ch. VII–VIII.

⁸ Cf. M. Idel, “The Magical and Neoplatonic Interpretations of the Kabbalah in the Renaissance” in ed. B. Cooperman, *Jewish Thought in the Sixteenth Century*, Cambridge, Mass., 1983, pp. 201–2.

⁹ See e.g. S. Gelbhaus, *Die Metaphysik der Ethik Spinozas im Quellenlichte der Kabbalah*, Wien-Bruen, 1917, pp. 79–81; M. Teitelbaum, *Der Rabh von Ladi*, Warschau, 1914, part II, pp. 99–120 [Hebrew].

¹⁰ H.W. Brann, “Spinoza and the Kabbalah” in ed. S. Hessing *Speculum Spinozanum 1677–1977*, London, Henley and Boston, 1977, pp. 112–113. On the gematria *Elohim* is equivalent to nature see the notes of Moshe Hallamish, *Sinai* vol. 85 [1979], pp. 265–266. [Hebrew]

¹¹ S. Pines, Introduction to the *Guide*, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, Chicago, 1963, p. XCVI, n. 66, idem, preface to *Le Livre de la connaissance* trs. V. Nikiprowetzky and A. Zaoui, Paris, 1961, p. 5; W.Z. Harvey, "A Portrait of Spinoza as a Maimonidean" *Journal of the History of Religion*, vol. XIX [1981], p. 162.

¹² See *Genesis Rabba*, XIII, 3 and R. Abraham ibn Ezra's *Commentary* on Ecclesiastes, XII, 14.

¹³ See already in the *Commentary on Mishnah, Haqiqah* II, 1; *Guide*, Introduction.

¹⁴ On the intellect as a "divine power" see already Maimonides's introduction to the *Commentary on the Mishnah*, and also M. Idel, "Sitrei Arayot in Maimonides' Thought", eds. S. Pines and Y. Yovel, *Maimonides and Philosophy*, Dordrecht-Boston-Lancaster, 1986, pp. 80-81, 90 n. 50. See below the passage from the *Commentary on the Secrets of Ibn Ezra*, attributed to Joseph ibn Caspi, which refers to this chapter of the *Guide* in order to comment on the gematria to be discussed in the following pages.

¹⁵ Cf. n. 10 above.

¹⁶ See M. Idel "Unio Mystica and Abraham Abulafia" [forthcoming].

¹⁷ Ms Oxford, 1682 fol. 101b. On this work of Abulafia see M. Idel, *The Works and Doctrines of R. Abraham Abulafia* [Ph.D Thesis, Hebrew University, Jerusalem 1976] pp. 4-5.

¹⁸ Exodus XXXI, 18.

¹⁹ This is common Midrashic view; see e.g. *Genesis Rabba*, XIV, 1.

²⁰ Cf. his commentary on Exodus, III, 15, and Abulafia's a *Get Ha-Shemot*, Ms. Oxford 1682, fol. 102a.

²¹ *ibid.* fol 102a-102b. For a detailed analysis of Abulafia's concept of the split of the Red Sea see Idel, *Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 190-192.

²² *ibid.* fol. 102b.

²³ Ms. New York, JTS 1801 fol. 19b-20a. See also *ibid.* fol. 8b.

²⁴ Cf. Idel, *Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 174-177.

²⁵ *Sitrei Torah* Ms. Paris, BN 774 fol. 161b.

²⁶ *Ibid.* fol. 162a.

²⁷ As, for example, the way *Zohar* reads the first verse of the Pentateuch; cf. Gershon Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, New York, 1967, p. 221.

²⁸ Ms. New York, JTS 1801 fol. 8b.

²⁹ *Kolel*, like the "appellative" *Kinnuy* are numerically equivalent to *Elohim*, namely 86.

³⁰ *Genesis Rabba*, XIV, 1.

³¹ *Hotam Ha-Hajtarah* Ms. Roma-Angelica 30 fol. 43a.

³² Compare however to Maimonides' *Code*, *Hilkhot Yesodei Torah*, III, 1 and to Gikatilla's *Ginnat Egoz*, fol. 52d-53a, where the highest sphere, that designated as 'Aravot, is described as the ninth sphere.

³³ See e.g. Maimonides, *ibidem*.

³⁴ See Idel, "Maimonides and Kabbalah."

³⁵ On the similarities between Gikatilla's *Ginnat Egoz* and the *Commentary on the Sefar Yezirah* by R. Barukh Togarmi, a person described by Abulafia as his master, see S. Blickstein, *Between Philosophy and Mysticism* [Ph. D. Ann Arbor, 1983] pp. 184-187.

³⁶ Hanau 1615, fol. 5c. The gematria *Elohim=Ha-Kisse*, already appeared in the works of Abulafia [seen. 29 above] recurs in Gikatilla's work several times: see e.g. *ibid.* fo. 5d, 12d, 13a, 13b.

³⁷ fol. 5d. This passage was paraphrased at the end of the 13th century by R. Abraham Esquira, a Spanish Kabbalist who wrote *Yesod 'Olam*, Ms. Moscow-Guensburg, 607 fol. 80b

³⁸ *Nistar*. Compare below the passage from an early Hasidic book, where the name *Elohim* is conceived as a shield of the Tetragrammaton. Several times in *Ginnat Egoz* Gikatilla refers to the appellative *Elohim* as comprising the Tetragrammaton: see e.g. fol. 13c, 14a.

³⁹ fol. 13c; this text is translated below when discussing the topic of *Natura naturans*.

⁴⁰ See par. VI below.

⁴¹ Ms. New York, JTS 1891 fol. 70ab. On the relationship of this text to Gikatilla see E. Gottlieb, *Studies in Kabbalistic Literature* ed. J. Hacker, Tel-Aviv, 1986, p. 111.

⁴² On the metaphor of the seal in connection to creation see below, par. VI.

⁴³ *Diglo*.

⁴⁴ *Anokhy* and *Yesod A* are numerically equivalent 81; the fact that *Anokhy*'s first letter is Aleph is understood by the Kabbalist as a hint to the special category of the entity referred by this gematria. On the other hand, *Teva*' is conceived here as pointing to an hypostatic being, the ten separate intellects, referred as *Binyan*, whose initial letter, B, is decoded as a hint to the secondary level of this entity. Compare n. 46 below.

⁴⁵ *Kisse*' and the eliptic spelling of *Eloim*, occurring in Gikatilla's text are numerically equivalent to the 81, like the first range entities; therefore, someone could draw the conclusion that the first Cause and nature are identical, a fact that Gikatilla was not ready to accept in this writing.

⁴⁶ Ms. New York JTS 1891 fol. 72b; "B is the secret of the intellects, which are the Structure [Binyan], since they emerge from the *Yesod*."

⁴⁷ Ms. Vatican 219 fol. 10a.

⁴⁸ *Ecclesiastes*, I, 7.

⁴⁹ The meaning of the connection between "Shiur Qomah" and the Sea is not clear; compare, however, M. Idel, "The Sefrot above the Sephirot" *Tarbiz* vol. 51 [1982], pp. 250-251. [Hebrew]

⁵⁰ Ms. Vatican 219 fol. 9b, 11b.

⁵¹ See Gottlieb, *Studies* [n. 41 above] pp. 110-117, especially p. 115.

⁵² Warschau, 1887, fol. 11d.

⁵³ Compare *Ginnat Egoz* fol. 13d.

⁵⁴ See E. Gottlieb, *The Kabbalah in the Writings of R. Bahya ben Asher ibn Halawa* Jerusalem 1970, pp. 150-51.

⁵⁵ Gate XVII, Ch. 4, Jerusalem 1962 part I fol. 83a.

⁵⁶ *Sha'arei Orah*, ed. J. ben Shlomo, Jerusalem 1970, vol. II, pp. 9-14.

⁵⁷ *Inquiries on the Nature of the Angels*, printed as an appendix to R. Margalioth's *Malakhei Eliyon* Jerusalem 1945, p. 78.

⁵⁸ Gate of Love, Ch. 7, fol. 76b; see also *ibid* ch. 11 fol. 97b.

⁵⁹ See R. Joseph ben Shalom Ashkenazi's *Kabbalistic Commentary on Genesis Rabbah* ed. M. Hallamish, Jerusalem 1984, p. 104.

⁶⁰ Cf. *Asarah Kelei Kese* ed. I. Last, Presburg, 1903, vol. II, p. 167.

⁶¹ This is, since Maimonides' *Code*, a standard appellative of the Agent Intellect.

⁶² *Sefer Tiqqun Ha-De'ot* ed. G. Vajda, Jerusalem, 1973 pp. 82-83. For a French translation of this passage see Vajda's *Isaac Albalag, Averroïste Juif, Traducisseur et Annotateur d'Al-Ghazali*, Paris 1960, pp. 208-210.

⁶³ Ms. Oxford, 1633 fol. 44b.

⁶⁴ Maimonides' impact on this work is obvious especially as far as the passage from the *Guide* where the tables are presented as the result of both natural and divine acts. See e.g. ms. Oxford, 836 fol. 166ab.

⁶⁵ On Abulafia's influence on this author see Idel, *The Mystical Experience* Ch. IV.

⁶⁶ Ms. Oxford, 836 fol. 165b.

⁶⁷ *Genesis*, II, 3.

⁶⁸ Ms. Oxford, 836 fol. 167b

⁶⁹ Jerusalem, 1977 fol. 90a. See also H.H. Ben Sason's preface to this work *ibid.* pp. 20-21, especially n. 82.

⁷⁰ See his *Kol Yehudah*, Muscato's Commentary on R. Yehudah Ha-Levi's *Kuzari* on I, par. 76.

⁷¹ Cf. *Ba'al Shem Tov*, *Genesis*, p. 45, *Keter Shem Tov*, Part II fol. 24c.

⁷² Psalms LXXXIV, 12.

⁷³ See e.g. R. Moses Cordovero's *Tefillah leMoshe*, Premislany, 1892, fol. 354b, where the Kabbalist compares the Tetragrammaton to a sword and the name *Elohim* to its sheath. See also above n. 38 where Gikatilla presented the Tetragrammaton as hidden in the appellative *Elohim*.

⁷⁴ Teitelbaum, *Der Rabh von Ladi* [note 9 above] vol. 2 pp. 43ff.

⁷⁵ See beside n. 31 above.

⁷⁶ See his *Sh'a ha-Shoel*, *passim*.

⁷⁷ See note 56 above.

⁷⁸ S. Pines, "The Limitations of Human Knowledge According to Al-Farabi, ibn Bajja and Maimonides" *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature*, ed. I. Twersky, Cambridge, Mass., pp. 82-109.

⁷⁹ See *Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 442-443.

⁸⁰ Cf. M. Idel, "Infinities of Torah in Kabbalah" in eds. G. Hartman, S. Budick, *Midrash and Literature*, New Haven, 1986, p. 149.

⁸¹ Idel "The Ladder of Ascension - The Reverberations of a Medieval Motif in the Renaissance" in ed. I. Twersky, *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature*, Cambridge, Mass., 1984 pp. 90-93.

⁸² See George D. Economou, *The Goddess Nature in Medieval Literature*, Cambridge, Mass., 1963, pp. 53-123.

⁸³ Henry A. Lucks, "Natura Naturans - Natura Naturata" *New Scholasticism* vol. 9 [1935], pp. 1-

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⁸⁴ *ibid*, p. 14-18.

⁸⁵ *Jabir ibn Hayyan, contribution a l'histoire des idees scientifiques dans l'Islam, Memoires de l'Institut d'Egypt* vol. 45 [1943] p. 137 n. 2. Louis Massignon "La nature dans la pensee islamique" *Eranosjahrbuch* vol. 14 [1946] pp. 144–148. S.H. Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*, Cambridge, Mass., 1964 pp. 8–9, 61, and Gad Ben-Ami Zarfati, "Hitqarut ha-'ivrit lilshonot Eiropah betivvukh ha-'Arvit" *Mehqarim belashon*, vol. 1 [Jerusalem, 1985], p. 255.

⁸⁶ ed. Joseph Kapih, Jerusalem, 1982, pp. 36–37, 64. A French translation of these passages was done by Mayer Lambert, *Commentaire sur le Sefer Yesira par le Gaon Saadya de Fayyoum*, pp. 30–31, 57 but this translation misses the terminological point.

⁸⁷ Cf. Moritz Steinschneider, *Hebraischen Uebersetzungen des Mittelalters*, 1893, p. 448.

⁸⁸ *Hilkhot Yesodei Torah*, IV, 2.

⁸⁹ "Shoken 'Ad MeAz", *Shirei Hakodesh le R. Shelomo ibn Gabirol*, ed. Dov Yarden, Jerusalem, 1981, vol. 1, p. 10.

⁹⁰ See also the use of the verb *TV'* in a creational context in the *Alphabet of R. 'Aqiva*, a mystical Midrash which was already in existence at the time of R. Saadya Gaon, cf. *Battei Midrashot*, ed. S. Wertheimer, Jerusalem 1955, vol. 2, p. 354.

⁹¹ Hen Merhavyah, "Out of the Poems of R. Benjamin bar Shemuel in a Latin Translation", *Hayyim [Jefim] Schirmann Jubilee Volume*, ed. Sh. Abramson, A. Mirsky, Jerusalem 1970, p. 202.

⁹² *ibidem*, p. 203.

⁹³ *Hovot ha-Levavot*, gate IV, Ch. 3; Compare also Gate II, Ch. 1.

⁹⁴ *Guide of the Perplexed*, II, Ch. 29.

⁹⁵ *Sanhedrin* IV, 5.

⁹⁶ *Golden Doves with Silver Dots*, Indiana U.P. Bloomington, 1986, pp. 18–28, 138–142.

⁹⁷ Ms. Vatican 291 fol. 31a. See also Abulafia's *Hayyei ha-Nefesh* Ms. Munchen 408 fol. 38b, 54b.

⁹⁸ *Ginnat Egoz* fol. 16b.

⁹⁹ *ibidem* fol. 13c.

¹⁰⁰ *ibidem* fol. 13b.

¹⁰¹ *ibidem* fol. 5d, 12d, 13cd, 16b,

¹⁰² *Aron 'Edut* Ms. Oxford 1633 fol. 164b.

¹⁰³ *Pardes Rimmonim*, Sabbioneta, 1554, fol. 44a.

¹⁰⁴ *Miphalot Elohim*, Lemberg 1863 fol. 81ab. This is by no means a complete list of the Hebrew sources that used the form *Teva' matbi'a* and *teva' mutba*; this list can be easily expanded.

¹⁰⁵ *The Philosophy of Spinoza* New York, 1969, vol. I, pp. 255–256.

¹⁰⁶ Gikatilla's work was one of the sources of R. Menashe ben Israel's exposition of Kabbalah still in manuscript, identified by Richard Popkin.

¹⁰⁷ See Lucks [note 83 above], p. 22.

¹⁰⁸ Our survey does not intend to analyze the peculiar usage Spinoza made of the Jewish mystical materials in his own writings, but mainly to draw attention to the existence and extent of the mystical material which may be relevant for a more detailed exposition of Spinoza's intellectual background. Likewise, it may well be, as Professor S. Pines had pointed out, that there may be also other sources for Spinoza's formulation *Deus sive natura*, a fact which does not, in my opinion, invalidate the probability of the influence of Jewish sources. Moreover, the repercussions of the gematria *Elohim-HaTeva'* in 18th century Hasidism remains beyond the frame of this study, this being an issue to be elaborated elsewhere. For the interesting treatment of this gematria by R. David Nieto, Spinoza's younger contemporary and the controversy it generated see A. Barzel, "Universal Nature and Particular Nature – On the Identification of God with Nature in a Sermon of David Nieto and in the Response of HeHakham Ashkenazi" *Daat* Vol. 18 [1986], pp. 67–80. [Hebrew]